THE ORTHODOX WORD

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LETTERS

ORTHODOX HOLY OBJECTS IN THE WEST

I have recently returned from a trip to Western Europe, on which I tried to see and venerate as many relics of Orthodox saints as possible. Unfortunately, none of the slides I took of the tombs and relics of Orthodox saints turned out (for example, the tomb of St. Rupert in Salzburg, the relics in the glass coffin of St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Protasius, and the incorrupt relics of St. Lucy in Venice). But much more unfortunately, since the "aggiornamento" in the Roman church, the shrines and relics of the Orthodox saints of God are being sorrowfully neglected in favor of popular, progressive and worldly "saints" (like John XXIII of sorry memory). Churches in Austria and Switzerland are well-kept; those of Italy in sorry disarray and disrepair. Piety, however, remains strong in Italy, although it is of that devotional type that seems somewhat offensive to the Orthodox consciousness. At the basilica of St. Ambrose, the church itself needs major repairs, and only a small fragment of the iconographic frescoes remain after centuries of neglect. (The original basilica dates back to the Saint's lifetime.) The tombs of St. Ambrose, St. Protasius, and one other are in a glass coffin Latin-style above the altar, which makes it impossible to kiss their precious relics. However, people do go to the chapel below the altar and light a profusion of candles. However, upstairs, children were singing a mass, and the melody of one of the hymns was "When the Saints Come Marching In," which scandalized me and made me feel that all the work St. Ambrose had done in that city for the faithful they have destroyed in a matter of 15 years (not counting the almost 1000 years of spiritual bankruptcy from Holy Orthodoxy preceding it).

Sadly, Western Europe (at least what I saw) is of little spiritual value to the Orthodox traveler. One can hardly pray amidst the Latin trappings surrounding many shrines of Orthodox saints, and the "renovated" Latin churches of Vatican II make the relics inaccessible — any spirit of piety has been eradicated by stripping bare the churches, modernizing them, and placing the holy relics of the saints totally out of the reach of the pious. For example, at St. Mark's in Venice, the precious relics of the Apostle are in a marble sarcophagus (in very bad shape) underneath a modern altar table facing the congregation; this is surrounded by a velvet rope like those used in movie theaters to control crowds, and not even an oil lamp or a single candle burns above the relics. At St. Peter's in Rome, likewise, very few lamps or candles (or even places for lighting them) are to be seen, and the relics of several of the Apostles (stolen from Constantinople during the Crusades are kept out of view.

As for the Shroud of our Lord in Turin (and I am convinced it is genuine until proven otherwise), it was having one of its rare exhibitions while I was there (the first in many years). I must say I

(*Continued on inside back cover*)

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of the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood

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the late *John (Maximovitch)*, Archbishop of
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General view of some of the pilgrims, with bishops at the left

Elder Nektary
1928-1978

Procession comes out with the Icon

Saint Herman
Summer Pilgrimage, 1978

ELDER NEKTARY'S ANNIVERSARY
1928-1978

JUST FIFTY YEARS AGO, on April 29/May 12, 1928, there reposed one of the great spiritual leaders of the true Orthodox Christians of Russia during the first frigthful period of persecution after the Russian Revolution — Elder Nektary of Optina Monastery To mark this anniversary of a spiritual giant of our century who is still almost unknown to most Orthodox Christians, the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood asked Bishop Nektary of Seattle to preside at a summer pilgrimage at the St. Herman Monastery. Bishop Nektary is the last surviving spiritual son of Elder Nektary.

The pilgrimage, celebrated in connection with the summer anniversary of St. Herman's canonization in 1970 (July 27/August 9), lasted for three days and was attended by sixty pilgrims. On the eve of the feast it was announced that the Wonderworking Icon of the Kursk Mother of God would arrive the next day for the celebration, and that Archbishop Anthony of San Francisco would be able to come to lead the celebration, accompanied by other clergy.

All the appointed services for the eve of a great feast were celebrated: Small Vespers, Compline with the reading of the rule of preparation for receiving Holy Communion, followed (after the evening meal) by the All-night Vigil.

The next morning the Kursk Icon was greeted with the ringing of bells, and the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by the two hierarchs, assisted by the monastery elder Archimandrite Spiridon, two hieromonks, a priest and deacon, and many acolytes. Almost all the pilgrims present received Holy Communion. After the procession around the church, a traditional monastic meal of cabbage soup, kasha and kvas was served, with most of the pilgrims seated at tables outside the refectory; during the meal the Life of St. Herman was read.

Early in the afternoon, on the site of the future monastery library building, the pilgrims gathered for lectures. Unfortunately, due to the extraordinary heat and the failing health of Bishop Nektary, he was unable to give a lecture. Instead, Hieromonk Herman opened the series of lectures with a brief account of the life and historic significance of Elder Nektary, incidentally revealing that Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo, another spiritual son of Elder Nektary, just before his own death a few months before the present pilgrimage had received from the Soviet Union the manuscript of a life of Elder Nektary, which he regarded as a reliable work by another of the Elder's spiritual children. This manuscript he had sent on to the St. Herman Brotherhood with permission to print it.

Now that Archbishop Andrew has reposed in the Lord, it was possible for Father Herman to present some incidents of his contact with Elder Nektary which the Archbishop had forbidden to be revealed before his death. These incidents showed the sanctity and clairvoyance of Elder Nektary, and in particular how Archbishop Andrew, then a young priest, had seen his beloved Elder shining in dazzling Divine light. Some incidents from Bishop Nektary's contact with the Elder were also mentioned — he himself being present as a living witness of the Elder's sanctity. Archbishop Anthony, also present, is another living link with Optina, being a disciple of the Optina disciple, the "young elder" Ambrose of Milkovo, where Archbishop John Maximovitch was tonsured a monk.

"CONTEMPORARY SIGNS OF THE END OF THE WORLD"

The next lecture was by Hieromonk Seraphim, on "Contemporary Signs of the End of the World." Father Seraphim began his talk with an introduction on the apocalyptic mood of our present times: the mood so widespread today of expecting some great crisis or even the end of the world, a mood that increases with the approach of the "millenial" year of 2000. Not only religious leaders of various sects and cults think in this way; even very secular thinkers speak openly of the great crisis of civilization approaching and even of the literal end of life on earth. To take one example: Alexander Solzhenitsyn, not a "mystical" or "vague" thinker, but a down-to-earth realist, in his Harvard address a few months before, had told Americans frankly that their humanistic civilization was collapsing from within and coming to an end, being in imminent danger of conquest by world Communism. Solzhenitsyn spoke further of the physical signs of the possible end of human civilization — the exhaustion of the earth's resources, the pollution of air and water and land (much worse in the Soviet Union than in America), the overpopulation of the world, the increasing shortage of food, and the development of weapons capable of destroying the world.

But Solzhenitsyn's profoundest words concerned the impossibility for men to live long without deep spiritual roots — the lack of these roots in the West being a chief sign of the approaching end of Western civilization.

Father Seraphim then turned to our Orthodox Christian attitude about the end of the world, and our watching for the spiritual signs of it The Orthodox attitude is based upon Holy Scripture (Matthew, ch. 24, Hebrews 10:37, I John 2:18, I Peter 4:7, II Peter 3:8-13, etc.). Fervent Christians from apostolic times to our own day are always expecting the nearness of the end: first one's own death, then the dissolving of this world, watching for signs of it and preparing for it. But there is also a false kind of waiting for the end: *chiliasm,* the supposed reign of Christ on earth *before* the end of the world, a reign of universal peace and prosperity on earth; this teaching is based on a misinterpretation of the Apocalypse, and it is widespread in historical times of uncertainty and crisis. The real reign of Christ with His saints is *now* in the Church, in the life of grace. Chiliasm is the basis of many sects, as well as contemporary Communism. Chiliastic belief has existed before, but never has it been more widespread than today, among both religious and political leaders.

Then the speaker turned to the spiritual signs in today's world of the nearness of the end. First he gave an Orthodox interpretation of Antichrist, and how the apostasy is to precede the final and greatest Antichrist; this apostasy seems to be one of the chief signs of our own times. The lecturer gave a brief historical account of the progress of the apostasy or falling away from the Orthodox Church, beginning with the schism of Rome in the 11th century, and greatly accelerating in the 20th century with the fall of the Orthodox empire; the "mystery of lawlessness" is obviously at work (II Thes. 2:7) in contemporary art and music, moral life, and Communism — the latter understood not as a political and economic system (where its failures are now evident to all) but as an extreme example of lawlessness, a sign of the end of civilization as we know it, as a spiritual sickness that fills the vacuum left by Christianity as it retreats before the apostasy. At its present rate of progress, Communism will conquer the world in a few more years; but it is not Antichrist, is not the end of history — it has nothing positive to inspire men with; it rather has the purpose of destroying man's links with the past and with Christianity, thus preparing mankind for the "religious" empire of Antichrist.

The speaker continued with brief discussions of other political forces in today's world which are embued with Communism's chiliastic philosophy: the United Nations and the Popes of Rome.

Another sign of our times which points to the nearness of the end is the present state of the Jews in Israel and the city of Jerusalem; for according to the Patristic interpretation of Scripture, Jerusalem will be the world capi-

tal of Antichrist and he will build the Temple there, where he will be worshipped as God. In our days the Jews have returned to Palestine for the first time since their dispersal in the first century, and since 1967 they have had the site of the Temple of Solomon. If you were to ask the world's political leaders and leading citizens where the capital of a world state should be — the majority, even today, would doubtless choose Jerusalem. Another sign among Jews is the increasing interest of young Jews in Christianity, leading often to their conversion (usually to evangelical sects of Protestantism). This seems to be a sign of the future conversion of the faithful remnant of Jews to Orthodoxy before the end of the world.

One of the chief characteristics of Antichrist will be his many false miracles — "signs and lying wonders . . . strong delusion" (II Thes. 2:9-11). Such signs and wonders are precisely characteristic of religious movements especially in the last decade or so: satanism (the open existence of which was unheard of before); Eastern religions with gurus, swamis, and Zen masters offering a "spiritual" alternative to the dead Christianity of the West; and studies and experiments in parapsychology, which bring men into contact with fallen spirits. Here the speaker quoted the Orthodox teaching as set forth by Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov concerning man's contact with these fallen spirits and the opening of the "doors of perception" into this fallen realm. Examples were given of contacts with demons in UFO encounters, and in "out of body" and some "after death" experiences — the experiences themselves are real enough, but those having them are totally unprepared to distinguish between what is from God and what is from deceiving spirits.

He further discussed the charismatic movement as another source, for would-be Christians, of the "signs and wonders" of the last times; the charismatic belief that we are living in a time of a great outpouring of the Holy spirit, a new age of the Holy Spirit — is the exact opposite of Scriptural prophecy and clearly a preparation for Antichrist.

After all these negative signs of the times — for the times are indeed very dark — the speaker ended with several of the positive signs of the end. First, there is the beginning of the movement of Jews towards Christ, mentioned above, even with Jewish converts to Orthodoxy; for St. Paul said: if the rejection of the Jews was the gaining of the Gentiles, what will the acceptance of the Jews be but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:15).

Second, there is the positive sign of Russia's religious revival. Of course, we should not have romantic illusions about this or overestimate it, but it is real, and the suffering in Russia has given Christians there the possibility for a firmer and stronger faith than in the spoiled West; Gulag (the prison system) has been a spiritual training which is totally lacking in the West. Fr. Dimitry

Dudko speaks directly to the heart of Orthodox Christians, in West as well as East, as no one in the West is capable of doing. Also, the Russian experience of life in the catacombs gives us an example of how to survive even under totalitarian tyranny. While the rest of the world is falling to Communism, Russia in its soul has rejected it. Here the lecturer mentioned the prophesies of some recent righteous ones that just before the end of the world Orthodox Russia will be restored and give the light of true Christianity to the whole world — if the Russian people will show repentance for their sins.

Finally, the speaker noted a positive sign among Orthodox Christians in the free world, which is occurring even in the midst of the general apostasy and indifference of the Orthodox world itself: many Orthodox, especially among the young, are coming back to an awareness of their own faith, are finding contact with the saints of all ages and with sufferers for Christ today — the experience of true Orthodox Christianity which had become all but extinct under the influence of today's worldly life and the modernists and ecumenists who follow the "spirit of the times." This new awareness is similar to the rediscovery of their Orthodox Faith by young people in Russia, and in part is perhaps inspired by it. Further, the rapid spread of Orthodox missions in Africa (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zaire, etc.) is another positive sign that the end may be near. Archbishop John Maximovitch, when asked if the prophecy concerning the preaching of the Gospel to all peoples before the end meant the preaching of any kind of Christian sect, said: "No, this means the preaching of Orthodoxy." In our days for the first time we are seeing the preaching of the Orthodox Gospel in many parts of the pagan countries of Africa, and the converts there are receiving it with an open-heartedness and simplicity often lacking in the more "sophisticated" converts of the West.

After this lecture, a brief talk was given by Fr. Stephen Pawlenko on "Orthodox Christians in Russia Today," with a strong plea to help the suffering Christians of the Soviet Union. Special emphasis was placed on helping the newly-imprisoned Igor Ogurtsov.

There followed a brief recess, when pilgrims were able to examine and buy books and icons in the monastery bookstore.

The final talk of the afternoon was given by Reader Alexey Young, editor of the missionary periodical *Nikodemos* and the new series of pocket-size books on the "Teachings of the Holy Fathers" on various subjects, brought together from the many Patristic sources now available in English. This talk was addressed to the younger people of the Pilgrimage, and is given (slightly abridged) below:

THE ORTHODOX MISSION TODAY — WHAT CAN WE DO?

By Reader Alexey Young

I would like to talk today especially to the young people who are present here, the teenagers sitting on the benches in back.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ said: *Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*

Imagine that you went to a country where everything was just right: everyone had a job, everyone owned a beautiful home and had plenty of money. Everyone seemed very happy. But after a while you discovered that there was something very wrong in that country: When people reached the age of 70 they had to take a pill which would make them die. This country, you see, didn't want any old people around.

What would you think of such a country as that? You would think it was a terrible place, wouldn't you? You would think it was a very, very sick country. Imagine, to have so much of this world's goods, so many material things, and yet put all of the old people to sleep, as though they were cats or dogs that weren't wanted any more.

And you would wonder what had gone wrong with such a country, wouldn't you? You'd think to yourself, *this* isn't a Christian country. In fact, this country couldn't even believe in God at all, for no one who believes in God would do such a terrible thing to its older people. In fact, you'd think that this must be a pagan country altogether, wouldn't you? And you would want to try to teach the citizens of that country something about God and Christ.

Now imagine that you went to a country where people had many, many material goods, just like in the other country I described. Only in *this* country people were allowed to grow old without interference; but instead, people allowed young, unborn children to be murdered. Whenever someone didn't want to have a child, they just went to a special clinic and had the child murdered. Wouldn't you think that *that* country was very sick, that it was a terrible and very pagan country that didn't believe in God or know anything about Christianity? Of course you would.

What country am I describing? Of course — our own.

You see, we live in a *very* pagan and godless country. We live in a country where millions and millions of people do not believe in God. And millions more do not even know about the true Church of Christ — Orthodoxy. In fact, they've never even heard of it!

This can only mean one thing: our country needs missionaries. But what is a missionary? What does a missionary do?

THE ORTHODOX MISSION TODAY

When our Lord called His Apostles to Him, He called simple and uneducated men — fishermen, mostly — and they came and followed Him. They gave up everything in order to do this. They didn't have college degrees. They didn't go to special schools for missionaries. They didn't have a degree in missionary work. But our Lord's holy love filled their hearts and they began to burn with a divine fire that enabled them to proclaim His teaching to the whole world.

This was the first Orthodox mission. It has never stopped from that day to this. It is still going on, wherever there are Orthodox Christians.

You are all members of the one true Church of Christ. This means that you have accepted the tidings of great joy: the news that God has sent His Only-begotten Son into this world to redeem us from our sins and to conquer death.

But is it not enough just to accept being a member of Christ's Church. You have a greater responsibility. You know, it wasn't enough for the Apostles just to confess their belief in Christ, either. After they believed, Christ said to them: *Go, and teach all nations.*

Have you ever heard of St. Cosmas Aitolos? He was a wonderful Greek saint of the 18th century. He began as a grammar school teacher. But he had it in his mind that there *must* be something more to life than just having a job, just earning a living.

He had a tremendous love for God and for Orthodoxy, and so eventually he became a monk so that he could begin to struggle to live the Angelic Life. Later he was also ordained a priest.

St. Cosmas prayed to God to know what was God's will for him. Since he had some teaching ability and experience he saw that he could put this into God's service. So he spent some time studying rhetoric — which is the art of speaking well — so that he would be able to effectively preach the Gospel of Christ. Then he received permission from those in authority to go out and preach the kingdom of God to ordinary people.

Of course, most of the people of his country were already Orthodox Christians — but in name only. Their life was so hard that they did not have time to study the great truths of their faith. They did not know many things about Orthodoxy and the way to save their souls.

And so, in a way, they needed a missionary who could come and "convert" them, someone who could teach them the things they needed to know in order to truly follow Christ. St. Cosmas was just the right kind of missionary for this work.

(Continued on page 38)

THE LIFE OF

Saint Symeon the New Theologian

BY HIS DISCIPLE NICETAS STETHATOS

As Condensed by Bishop Theophanes the Recluse*

1. His Life in the World

SAINT SYMEON WAS BORN (in 949) in the Paphlagonian village of Galatia, of renowned and wealthy parents. His father's name was Basil, and his mother's Theophano. From his childhood he manifested both great talents and a meek and reverent manner, with a love for solitude. When he reached the age of a youth his parents sent him to Constantinople to relatives who were eminent at the court. There he was given over to study, and soon he passed through the so-called grammatical courses. He should then have gone over to the philosophical courses, but he refused to do this, fearing to be drawn away into something unprofitable by the influence of his companions. The uncle with whom he lived did not force him, but hastened to lead him into the path of public service, which in itself is quite a strict discipline for those who are attentive. He presented him to the brother-emperors Basil and Constantine Porphyrogenetes, and they included him among the number of courtiers.

But it was a small thing for Saint Symeon that he had become a member of the imperial council. His desire was fixed on something different, and his heart was elsewhere. Even during the time of his studies, he had become acquainted with the Elder Symeon, who was called the Reverent. He often visited him and made use of his counsel in everything. With all the more freedom, and

* In the introduction to his translation of St. Symeon's Homilies, Moscow, 1892.

at the same time necessity, did he do this now. His sincere desire was as quickly as possible to devote himself to the life of renunciation of the world. But the Elder persuaded him to have patience, waiting until his good intention should become ripe and more deeply rooted, because he was still very young (about 21 years old). He continued, however, to counsel and guide him, preparing him gradually for monastic life even in the midst of worldly cares.

Saint Symeon himself did not love to give himself over to luxuries, and together with his usual labors of self-mortification, he devoted all of his free time to reading and prayer. The Elder furnished him with books, telling him which passages in them he should pay special attention to. Once when giving him a book of the writings of Mark the Ascetic, the Elder indicated to him various utterances in them, counselling him to reflect most carefully on them and to direct his conduct according to them.

Among the number of these utterances was the following: "If you desire to have always a soul-saving guidance, pay heed to your conscience and without fail do what it will instil in you." This utterance Saint Symeon took so much to heart that it was as if it had come from the mouth of God Himself, and he made a rule to pay strict heed to and obey his conscience, believing that, since it was the voice of God in the heart, it would instil in him always what was soul-saving. From this time on he gave himself over entirely to prayer and instruction in the Divine Scriptures, keeping vigil until midnight and eating only bread and water, and taking them only as much as was needed to support life. Thus he became ever more immersed in himself and in the realm of God. At this time he was vouchsafed the grace-given illumination which he himself describes in his Homily on faith, speaking as if it were some other youth. Here the grace of God granted him to taste more fully the sweetness of life according to God and by this means cut off the taste for everything earthly.

2. *The Account of the Youth George**

There lived in Constantinople a youth by the name of George, about twenty years old. All this was in our days, in our own memory. He had a handsome face, and in his walk, his bearing and his manner there was something ostentatious. Therefore, those who see only what is on the surface and, not knowing what is hidden within each man, judge mistakenly about others, made various evil suppositions about him. He made the acquaintance of a certain monk

* Added to the Life here from St. Symeon's own words in Volume 5 of the Russian *Philokalia*, pp. 322-325.

who lived in one of the monasteries of Constantinople, a holy man, and, revealing to him the innermost secrets of his heart, he also told him that he greatly desired to save his soul. The good father, after instructing him in a fitting way, gave him a small rule to follow and the little book of St. Mark the Ascetic where he writes on the spiritual law. The youth accepted the book with as much love and reverence as if it had been sent to him by God Himself, and he conceived a strong faith in it, hoping to gain from it great benefit and much fruit. Therefore, he read it through with much zeal and attention and received great benefit from it all.

Of all the paragraphs in the book, three made a particularly deep impression on his heart. The first was: "If you seek healing, take care for your conscience (pay heed to it), and do what it tells you, and you will receive profit" (Para. 69). The second was: "He who seeks (hopes to receive) the activity of the Holy Spirit before practicing the commandments, is like a slave bought for money who, the moment he is bought, expects his freedom to be signed together with the payment of his purchase price" (Para. 64). The third was: "He who prays physically without having yet acquired a spiritual understanding, is like the blind man who cried out: *Son of David, have mercy on me* (Mark 10:48). But another man who had been blind, when his eyes were opened and he saw the Lord, no longer called Him Son of David, but confessed Him as the Son of God (John 9:35, 38)" (Para. 13, 14).

These three paragraphs pleased him greatly, and he believed that, by paying heed to his conscience, as the first paragraph asserts, he would receive healing (of his infirmities of soul); that through fulfilling the commandments he would obtain the activity of the Holy Spirit, as the second paragraph teaches; and that, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, his mental eyes would be opened and he would see the ineffable beauty of the Lord, as the third paragraph promises.

And so he became wounded by love for this beauty, and though, as yet he did not see it, he conceived a strong longing for it and sought it fervently, in the hope of finding it in the end.

In spite of all this, he did nothing special (as he assured me with an oath), except that every evening without fail he practiced the small rule which the Elder had given him, and he never went to bed to sleep without performing it. But after some time his conscience began to urge him: Make a few more prostrations, recite a few extra psalms, repeat "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me!" as many more times as you can. He willingly obeyed his conscience and did all it suggested without reflection, as though God Himself had commanded it; and he never lay down to sleep with his conscience reproaching him, saying: "Why did you not do this or that?" Thus he always listened to his conscience,

never leaving undone whatever it suggested to him. And every day it added more and more to his usual rule, and in a few days his evening prayers grew into a long rule.

His days he spent in the palace of a certain Patricius, his work being to care for the needs of all the people living there. But every evening he went away, and no one knew what he did at home: he shed copious tears, made a great many bendings of the knee, prostrating himself with his face to the ground; when he stood at prayer he always kept his feet tightly pressed together and stood without moving; with pain of heart, with sighing and tears he recited prayers to the Most Holy Mother of God; and addressing himself to the Lord Christ, he fell at His immaculate feet as if He had been there in body, and implored Him to have mercy on him, as He once had on the blind man, and to open the eyes of his soul. Each evening his prayers grew longer so that at last he stood at prayer until midnight. Yet he never permitted himself when at prayer either slothfulness or negligence or loose postures, never let his eyes turn to the right or left or upwards to look at anything, but stood motionless, like a pillar or as though he were bodiless.

Once when he was thus standing at prayer and was saying, more in his mind than with his lips: "O God, have mercy on me a sinner," — suddenly a most brilliant Divine radiance descended on him from above and filled all that place. Then this youth forgot that he was in a room or beneath a roof, for on all sides he saw nothing but light; he was not even aware whether there were any ground under his feet. He had no more care for anything worldly, and there came to his mind none of the thoughts which usually are in the minds of men clothed with flesh. He became wholly dissolved in this immaterial light, and it seemed to him that he himself became light. He forgot the whole world and was filled with tears and unspeakable joy. Then his mind rose upwards to the heavens, and there he saw another light, brighter than that light which surrounded him. And to his astonishment it seemed to him that on the edge of this light stood the holy and angelic Elder who had given him the small precept on prayer and the little book of St. Mark the Ascetic.

On hearing this from the youth, I thought that he had been greatly helped by the prayer of his Elder, and that God had granted him this vision to show the height of virtue on which this Elder stood. When the vision had passed and the youth came to himself, he found himself (as he said later) filled with joy and amazement, and he wept with his whole heart, which was filled with tears and great sweetness. Finally he went to bed, but immediately a cock began to crow, showing that it was already midnight. A little later he heard the church bells ringing for Matins; so the youth got up to read Matins,

according to his custom. Thus he never slept that night; the thought of sleep never entered his mind.

How all this came to pass, the Lord knows, Who did it by ways known to Him. Yet this youth did nothing in particular, except always to fulfill faithfully the rule given him by the Elder, and to follow the instructions contained in the little book, with steadfast faith and undoubting hope. And let no one say that he did all this as a test. Such a thing never even entered his mind. He who makes tests does not possess firm faith. But this youth, putting aside every passionate and self-indulgent thought, took such care over the faithful fulfillment of what his conscience suggested, that he no longer had any sympathy for the things of this world; even food and drink he did not eat for enjoyment or to satiety.

3. His Deepening Resolve to Leave the World

After this it was natural that there should be manifest in Saint Symeon a powerful impulse to leave the world. But the Elder did not judge it good to satisfy this impulse immediately, and he convinced him to be patient yet longer.

Thus six years passed. It happened that he had to go away to his native place, and he went to the Elder to receive his blessing. Even though the Elder declared to him that now the time had come for him to enter monasticism, still he did not keep him from going to his native place. Saint Symeon gave his word that as soon as he should return he would leave the world. On the journey he took with him as guidance the *Ladder* of Saint John. Having come to his village, he was not drawn away by worldly matters, but continued the same kind of strict and solitary life, something for which the way of life in his household gave great opportunity. There was a church very near, and next to the church a little cell, and not far from it a cemetery. In this little cell he shut himself up. He prayed, read and gave himself over to reflection on God.

At one time he was reading in the holy *Ladder* that insensitivity is the mortification of the soul and the death of the mind before the death of the body. And he became zealous always to banish from his soul this disease of insensitivity. For this aim he would go out at night to the cemetery and pray fervently, reflecting at the same time on death and the future judgment, and also on what now had become of the dead over whose tombs he was praying, the dead who had been alive just like him. To this he added a stricter fast and a vigil that was longer and more vigilant. Thus he kindled in himself the spirit of life according to God, and the burning of it kept him constantly in a condition of contrite feeling which did not allow any insensitivity. If it happened that a coolness

came near, he would hasten to the cemetery, weep and lament, beating himself on the breast, and would not rise from the place until his usual contrite feeling returned. The fruit of this way of life was that the image of death and mortality became so deeply impressed in his consciousness that he did not look either upon himself or upon others except as upon dead men. Because of this no kind of beauty captivated him, and the usual movements of the flesh he mortified at their very appearance, being himself on fire with the fire of contrition. Lamentation became his food.

Finally came the time for him to return to Constantinople. His father asked him to remain home until his own departure for the other world; but seeing where the fiery desire of his son was directed, with love and a willing blessing he parted from him.

4. His Entrance into Monasticism

The time of the return to Constantinople was for Saint Symeon the time of renunciation of the world and entrance into a monastery (at the age of 27). The Elder received him with a father's embrace and presented him to the abbot of his monastery of the Studion, Peter; but the latter gave him back into the hands of the Elder himself, this great Symeon the Reverent. Having received the young monk as a pledge of God, the Elder conducted him to a certain small cell, which was more like a tomb, and there he sketched out for him the order of the narrow and most grievous monastic life. He said to him: "Behold, my son, if you wish to be saved, go to church without fail, stand there with reverent prayer without distraction, and do not have conversations with anyone; do not go from cell to cell, do not be presumptuous, preserve your mind from wandering, pay heed to yourself and reflect on your own sinfulness, on death and the judgment."

In his severity, however, the Elder kept a reasonable measure, being concerned also lest his offspring have any attachment even to his strict labors. For this sometimes he assigned him difficult and belittling obediences, and sometimes easy and honorable ones. Sometimes he increased his fasting and vigil, and at other times he forced him to take food until he was full, and to sleep as much as needed; and by every means he trained him to renounce his own will and his own personal desires for himself.

Saint Symeon sincerely loved his Elder, revered him as a wise father, and not in a single thing did he step away from his will. He was so reverent before him that he would kiss the place on which the Elder had prayed; and

so deeply did he humble himself before him that he did not consider himself worthy to approach and touch his garment.

5. His Trials as a Novice

Such a kind of life does not occur without special temptations, and the enemy soon began to make them for him. He brought upon him a heaviness and weakness in his whole body, after which there followed a laziness and darkness of mind to such an extent that it seemed to him that he could not stand or open his mouth for prayer nor listen to the church service, nor even raise his mind on high. Understanding that this condition was not like the usual exhaustion from labors or like any kind of disease, the Saint armed himself against it by patience, forcing himself not to indulge himself in any way, but on the contrary to increase his efforts to do the opposite of what was being instilled in him, using this as a needful means for restoring his usual condition.

This battle, with God's help and the prayers of the Elder, was crowned with victory. God consoled him with the following vision: a certain cloud seemed to rise upwards from his feet and was dispersed in the air, and he felt himself wakeful, lively, and so light that it was as if he had no body. The temptation passed away, and the Saint in gratitude to the Redeemer resolved from this time never to sit down during Divine services, even when this is allowed by the typicon.

Then the enemy raised against him warfare of the flesh, disturbing him by thoughts, alarming him by movements of the flesh, and in his sleep presenting to him shameful imaginings. By God's grace and the prayers of the Elder this battle also was won.

Further, his relatives and even his parents rose up with the desire to persuade him to moderate his strictness or even to leave monasticism altogether. But this also not only did not lessen his usual struggles, but on the contrary increased them in certain respects, especially with relation to solitude, separation from everyone, and prayer.

Finally, the enemy armed against him the brethren of the monastery, his fellow strugglers, who did not like his life, even though they themselves were no friends of loose living. From the very beginning certain of the brethren were very well-disposed to him and praised him, but others were unapproving and treated him with reproaches and mockery, more often behind his back, but sometimes even right to his face. Saint Symeon paid no attention either to the praises or the reproaches, either to respect or disrespect, but strictly kept to the rules of life of inward and outward conduct which had been estab-

lished with the counsel of his Elder. And the Elder often renewed his exhortations to him to be firm and endure everything manfully, and especially to strive to so attune his soul that it might above all be meek, humble, simple, and without malice, because only in such souls is the grace of the Holy Spirit accustomed to dwell. Hearing such a promise, the Saint increased his zeal for life according to God.

Meanwhile, the dissatisfaction of the brethren increased more and more, the number of the dissatisfied increased, and even the abbot sometimes joined them. Seeing that the scandal was increasing, the Elder transferred his spiritual offspring to the renowned Anthony, abbot of the monastery of Saint Mamas (in Constantinople), limiting his own guidance to watching over him from a distance, and to frequent visits. Here also the life of Saint Symeon proceeded in the order which had now become usual for him. His advancement in ascetic life, not only outward but above all inward, became evident and gave hope that in the future also his zeal for this would not grow faint. Therefore the Elder decided finally to make him a full monk through the tonsure and by clothing him in the schema.

6. He Becomes a Monk, and an Instructor of Monks

This joyous event renewed and increased the ascetic virtues of the Saint. He gave himself entirely over to solitude, to reading, to prayer and thoughts of God. The whole week he would eat only vegetables and grains, and only on Sundays would he go to the table of the brethren. He slept little, and that on the floor, only laying a sheepskin over the rug. On Sundays and feast days he performed all-night vigils, standing at prayer from evening until morning, and for the whole day thereafter he would give himself no rest. Never did he utter an idle word, but he preserved always an extreme heedfulness and a sober self-concentration. He sat all closed up in his cell, and if he would go out to sit on a bench, it seemed as if he were drenched with tears and bore on his face the reflection of the flame of prayer. He read most of all the lives of saints, and after reading would sit down at his handicraft, which was calligraphy; he would copy something for the monastery and the elders or for himself. From the first sound of the semantron (announcing the morning service), he would stand up and hasten to church, where, with all prayerful heedfulness, he would listen to the order of Divine services. Whenever there was Liturgy, he would each time receive communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, and all that day he would remain in prayer and thoughts of God. He would usually keep vigil until midnight, and then, after sleeping a little, would go to church to pray together

with the brethren. During Great Lent he spent the five week days without food; on Saturday and Sunday he would go to the table of the brethren and eat whatever was given to everyone. He did not lie down to sleep, but merely leaned over with his head on his arms and thus dosed off for an hour or so.

Thus he spent two years in this monastery which was new to him, growing in good temper and asceticism, and becoming wealthy in knowledge of the divine mysteries of salvation through the reading of the word of God and the writings of the Fathers, through his own thoughts of God, and through conversation with revered elders, especially with his own Symeon the Reverent and with Abbot Anthony.

These elders finally judged that the time had come for Saint Symeon to share with others the treasures of spiritual wisdom which he had acquired, and they placed on him the obedience of giving instructive talks in church for the edification of the brethren and all Christians. Even before this, from the very beginning of his ascetic life, together with the extracts from Patristic writings of everything which he considered that was needed for the saving of his soul, he occupied himself also with the writing down of his own ideas, which increased in him during the hours of reflection on God. But now this occupation became for him an obligation, with the difference that the edification now was to be addressed not only to himself but also to others. His speech was usually simple. Clearly beholding the great truths of our salvation, he set them forth in a way understandable to everyone, without in the least decreasing by simplicity of speech their height and depth. He was listened to with satisfaction by the elders themselves.

7. He Becomes a Priest and Abbot

After a little while, his constant guide, Symeon the Reverent, conceived the desire to consecrate him to the rank of priest by ordination. At about the same time, the abbot of the monastery died, and the brethren with a common voice chose in his place Saint Symeon. Thus at one and the same time he both received consecration as priest and was raised up to be abbot by the Patriarch at that time, Nicholas Chrysoberges.

Not without fear and tears did he accept these seeming promotions, which in actual fact were unbearable burdens. He judged concerning the ranks of priest and abbot not according to their outward appearance, but according to the essence of the matter. Therefore, he prepared himself to receive them with all heedfulness, reverence and devotion to God. For such a good outlook he was vouchsafed during the minutes of his ordination, as he later affirmed, a special mercy of God: a sensing of grace descending into the heart and the beholding of

a certain spiritual, invisible light which overshadowed and penetrated him. This condition was repeated in him later every time that he served the Liturgy for all the 48 years of his priesthood, as may be guessed from his own words when he speaks seemingly of some other priest to whom this occurred.

Therefore, when he was asked what a priest is, and what priesthood is, with tears he would reply, saying: "Alas, my brethren, why do you ask me about this? This is a matter of which it is fearful even to think. I bear the priesthood unworthily, but I know well what a priest should be. He should be pure both in body and all the more in soul, not stained by any kind of sin, humble in outward manner and contrite of heart in his inward disposition. When he serves the Liturgy he should behold God in his mind, while directing his eyes to the Gifts being offered. He should be consciously joined in his heart to Christ the Lord Who is there, so as to have the boldness of a son in conversing with God the Father, and to cry out without condemnation: *Our Father.*" This is what our holy Father said to those who asked him about priesthood, and he implored them not to seek this mystery, which is high and fearful even for the angels themselves, before they come into a condition like that of the angels by means of many labors and struggles over themselves. "It is better," he said, "to exercise oneself every day with fervor in the doing of the commandments of God, every minute offering true repentance to God if one happens to sin in some way, not only by deed or word but even by the hidden thought of one's soul. And by this means one may daily offer to God both for oneself and for one's neighbors a sacrifice, a spirit which is contrite, tearful prayers and entreaties, this hidden sacred activity within us over which God rejoices. And receiving it upon His altar above the heavens, He grants to us the grace of the Holy Spirit." Thus he taught others, and in the same spirit he himself served the Liturgy.

And when he served the Liturgy, his face became like an angel's and was penetrated with such light that it was not possible to look freely at him by reason of the extraordinary brightness coming from him, just as it is impossible to look freely at the sun. Concerning this there are the true testimonies of many of his disciples and others.

Having become abbot, the Saint's first act was the restoration of the monastery, because it was in need of repair in many parts. The church, which had been built by the Emperor Maurice, was in quite good condition; but after the restoration of the monastery he cleaned it also in some places and restored it in others, put down a marble floor, and adorned it with icons, church utensils, and everything needful. In the meantime he also improved the refectory and set as a rule that all should go to the refectory, not having special food by them-

selves. And so that this might be fulfilled the better, he himself went always to the common table, without, however, changing his usual rule of fasting.

The brethren began to increase, and he instructed them by word, example, and the common well-ordered rule of life, being zealous to make them all men of desires of God our Saviour. God increased in him also the gift of contrition and tears, which were for him food and drink. But he had for these tears three separate times: after Matins, during the Liturgy, and after Compline, at which times he would pray more fervently with abundant shedding of tears.

His mind was bright, clearly beholding the truths of God. He loved these truths with all the fullness of his heart. Therefore, when he would give a talk either privately or in church, his words went from heart to heart and were always effective and fruit-bearing.

He also wrote. Often the whole night he would sit composing theological reflections or a commentary on the Divine Scriptures, or instructions and talks which were edifying for everyone, or prayers in verse, or letters to various disciples, both laymen and monks. Lack of sleep did not disturb him, neither did hunger or thirst or the other needs of the body. All this was brought by long struggle into the most modest measure and became habit, as if it were a law of nature. However, despite such deprivations, in appearance he always seemed fresh, robust, and lively, just like those who eat and drink and sleep to satiety.

The fame of the Saint and his monastery went everywhere and gathered to him all zealots of the true life of renunciation of the world. He received everyone, instructed them and raised them up to perfection by his guidance. Many of them with all fervor undertook this work and successfully followed after their teacher. All of them presented as it were a choir of fleshless angels, constantly praising God and serving Him.

Having thus put his monastery in order, Saint Symeon conceived the intention of going into silence, appointing a special abbot for the brethren. He chose in his place a certain Arsenius, who had been tested many times by him, was well-rooted in good conduct, in good outlook of heart and in the ability to conduct monastery business. Transferring to him the burden of being abbot, in a general assembly of the brethren he gave him proper insruction on how to govern, and to the brethren he gave instruction on how to live under his rule. Having asked forgiveness of everyone, he went away into the cell which he had chosen for silence, in order to remain there without leaving, being alone with God in prayer, reflection on God, reading of the Scriptures, in sobriety and discernment of thoughts. To these struggles there was nothing for him to add. His struggles had always been in a state of concentration to the utmost extent; but, of course, the grace which guided him in everything knew what was

most useful for him in this new way of life and suggested it to him. The gift of teaching, which had previously found satisfaction in instruction given both in private and in church, now turned all his attention and labor to writing. He wrote at this time his more ascetic teachings in the form of short utterances, an example of which we have in the active and contemplative chapters which have come down to us.

8. *The Great Trial over the Veneration of His Elder*

However, the Saint was not fated to enjoy undisturbed peace to the end. A trial was sent to him, a mighty and alarming one, in order that he might burn utterly and be purified to the end in this fire. His Elder, Symeon the Reverent, his spiritual father and guide, departed to the Lord in great old age, after 45 years of strict ascetic life. Saint Symeon, knowing his ascetic labors, his purity of heart, his closeness to God and communion with Him, and the grace of the Holy Spirit which overshadowed him, composed in his honor some homilies, hymns, and canons of praise, and he brightly celebrated his memorial every year, having painted also an icon of him. Perhaps his example was imitated by others both within the monastery and outside, because he had many disciples and venerators among monks and laymen. Hearing about this, the Patriarch of that time, Sergius, summoned Saint Symeon and inquired about the feast and the cause of the feast. But having seen what an exalted life Symeon the Reverent had led, not only did he not oppose the celebration of his memory, but he himself began to take part in it, sending icon lamps and incense. Thus sixteen years passed. In memory of him who was the cause of the feast, men glorified God and were instructed by his exemplary life and virtues. But finally the enemy raised up because of this a storm of temptation.

A certain Stephen, Metropolitan of Nicomedia, who was very learned and eloquent in word, left his diocese and lived in Constantinople, having access to the Patriarch and the court. Being a man of this world, when he heard that everywhere people were praising the wisdom and sanctity of Saint Symeon, and especially his marvelous writings composed for the instruction of those seeking salvation, he rose up in envy against him. Leafing through his writings, he found them not very learned and not eloquent; therefore, he had an attitude of disdain towards them, and discouraged from reading them those who liked to do so. From criticism of his writings, he desired to go over to criticism of the Saint himself, but he could not find anything for reproach in his life until, in his evil intent, he came upon his custom of celebrating the memory of Symeon the Reverent. This custom seemed to him to be against church order and some-

thing scandalous. Certain of the parish priests and laymen agreed with him in this, and they all began to drone in the ears of the Patriarch and the bishops who were around him, inspiring a lawless intrigue against the righteous one. But the Patriarch and the bishops, knowing the works of the Saint and knowing from whence and why this agitation was coming, paid no attention to it. However, having begun his evil deed, Stephen was not appeased, and he continued to spread dissatisfaction in the city with regard to the Saint on this account, not forgetting to remind the Patriarch of this also, so as to incline him to think the same.

Thus for about two years a war was waged between the righteousness of the Saint and the lie of Stephen. The latter was always seeking out whether there might not be something in the life of the respected Elder that might cause some doubt as to his sanctity. And he found that Symeon the Reverent sometimes said, in his feelings of humility, "I also have temptations and falls." These words he accepted in the crudest sense, and he went to the Patriarch with them as with emblems of victory, saying, "This is the kind of man he was and this Symeon respects him as a saint and has even painted an icon of him and bows down to it." They called the Saint and demanded of him an explanation with regard to the accusation brought against his Elder. He replied: "As regards my celebration of the memory of my father who gave birth to me in the life according to God, Your Holiness, my Master, knows this better than I. As for the accusation, let the most wise Stephen prove something more convincing than what he says. And when he shall prove it, then I will enter into defense of my revered Elder. I myself cannot help but revere my Elder, following the commandments of the Apostles and the Holy Fathers; but I do not try to persuade anyone else to do this. This is a matter of my conscience, and others may do as they please." With this explanation they were satisfied, but they gave a commandment to the Saint in future to celebrate the memory of his Elder as humbly as possible, without any kind of solemnity.

And thus the matter would have ended if it were not for this Stephen. He was given no repose by the failure of his attacks, and for six more years he continued to try to invent something and attract the Saint to reply to him and to explain himself. Meanwhile, he attained in some way from the cell of the Saint an icon where Symeon the Reverent was depicted in a choir of other saints being overshadowed by Christ the Lord, Who was blessing them. And he managed to persuade the Patriarch and his Synod in the interests of peace to agree to blot out the inscription over his face which said "Saint." In this regard Stephen raised throughout the city a whole persecution against the icon of

Symeon the Reverent, and zealots like himself acted with regard to it exactly as in the times of the iconoclasts.

This agitation took on a more and more disorderly character, and there was no end to the pestering of the Patriarch and the bishops with regard to it. Seeking out means of bringing about peace, they decided that for the pacifying of minds and the satisfaction of Stephen, it might be sufficient to send Saint Symeon away from Constantinople. Not seeing how he celebrated the memory of his Elder, others also would begin to forget about it, and finally it would be forgotten altogether. Having decided this, they ordered the Saint to find himself another place for silence outside of Constantinople. He agreed to this with joy, loving the silence which was so often and with such agitation violated in the city.

9. His Last Years in Retirement

Somewhere near Constantinople the Saint came to love a certain locality where there was the ancient church of Saint Marina, and he settled there. The owner of this place, one of the powerful archons, Christopher Phagoura, a disciple and venerator of Symeon, greatly rejoiced when he heard of his choice. Therefore, he himself hastened there and gave total repose to his spiritual father, both by the place he provided him and by furnishing everything needful to him. Even more, at the advice of the Saint he dedicated to God this whole place and entrusted it to the Saint for the building of a monastery.

Meanwhile, in Constantinople the venerators of the Saint, finding out about his departure, were in perplexity as to why this had happened. The Saint wrote them, telling them how everything had happened, and begged them not to become disturbed over him, assuring them that everything was for the best and that it was much more peaceful for him in his new place. His venerators, however, among whom there were quite a few eminent persons, did not wish to leave him without their intercession. Therefore, coming to the Patriarch, they asked for an explanation, wondering whether there were not something hostile and unjust with regard to their spiritual father in this matter. In order to calm them the Patriarch assured them that he also respected the Saint and venerated his Elder, and that he himself approved of the celebration of his memory, with the single reservation that this should be done not so triumphantly. As for his being sent away, this was acknowledged as profitable as a means of stopping the agitation which had been raised in the city against this celebration. So that there might not remain any doubt with regard to this among the eminent persons, he invited them to come to him another time together with Saint Symeon, and in his presence he repeated the same thing. The Saint confirmed the

words of the Patriarch, assuring them that he had nothing against anyone, and all the less against His Holiness, whose attention he had always enjoyed; and right here he asked his blessing for the establishment of the monastery he already intended to establish. These explanations pacified all who were disturbed by the sending away of the Saint. After this the Saint also wrote a peaceful letter to Metropolitan Stephen, and the common peace was restored.

Upon leaving the Patriarch, the Saint and his friends were invited to visit the above-mentioned Christopher Phagoura, and at his home they all made a collection among themselves of the sum needed for building the monastery. After this the building itself was quickly begun, and although it was not without obstacles, it was quickly finished. Gathering a new brotherhood and establishing in it the order of monastic life, Saint Symeon again went away from everything and sat in silence with his usual struggles and labors, devoting all his time, apart from chance conversations with those who were in need of counsel, to writing instructive homilies, ascetic instructions, and prayerful hymns.

From this time on his life proceeded peacefully until his very death. He matured into a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13), and manifested himself as richly adorned with gifts of grace. He uttered prophecies concerning certain persons which were fulfilled in reality. By his prayers there were many healings, which he performed by commanding that the sick be annointed with oil from the lamp which burned before the icon of Saint Marina.

For thirteen years the Saint remained in his new monastery, and then the end of his life on earth drew near (in 1022). Feeling the nearness of his departure, he called his disciples, gave them necessary instruction, and, after receiving communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, commanded them to sing the prayers for the departure of the soul, during which, while praying, he departed saying, "Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commit my soul."

Thirty years after this, his relics were uncovered (in 1050), and they were filled with heavenly fragrance and glorified by miracles. The memory of Saint Symeon the New Theologian is celebrated on March 12, the day of his repose.

His divinely-wise writings were preserved and brought into general circulation by his disciple, Nicetas Stethatos, to whom the Saint himself had entrusted them. This Nicetas, during the lifetime of the Saint, copied out his writings in good form as they were composed, and later gathered them together into one collection.

*10. The Writings of Saint Symeon**

The chief subject of St. Symeon's writings is the hidden activity in Christ (spiritual life). He explains the path of the inward warfare, instructs in the most spiritual means for perfection, exhorts to struggle primarily against the spiritual passions, against sinful impulses and movements. The beginning of our fall, he says, is performed in the soul out of pride, which is why we must humble the soul. Certain of his contemporaries, trusting too much to outward virtues, being passionately attached to the Studite rule but not to its spirit, rose up against the Saint as a violator of the way of salvation which they knew so well. From the works of St. Symeon it is clearly evident that he had no idea of rejecting outward struggles; but, while teaching his disciples to observe them, he demanded a battle against the sin-loving soul. He himself went on the path of inward sorrows, with the aid of grace, and he demanded the same of others. Let us look at his reply to his contemporary questioners, and it will give a sufficient indication of the subjects of his instruction.

"People believe and convince themselves that it cannot be that a man should be completely pure of lusts and vices so as to receive the Comforter in himself essentially. Such ones speak and act against their own salvation; they close for themselves the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven and forbid others, who might wish to do so, to enter. If they hear about anyone that he has lawfully struggled and is pure of disturbing passions, that he preaches before everyone the wonders of God which God has worked in him according to His unlying promise . . . they say: 'Stop, you are deceived and proud! Who is such as the Fathers were? Who has seen or can see God? Who has received the Spirit in such abundance that he has been vouchsafed through Him to see the Father and the Son?' Yes, it is none of you, precisely so, as you yourselves say. But from among those who have resolved to bear the cross, to go on the narrow path, who are ready to lose their soul for the sake of eternal life — very many of such ones have seen God, and very many, as I think, see Him now, and everyone who only wishes to do so will see Him."

"They say: 'He is deceived; for he that says that he has no sin is blind and does not see.' This is true; but he who has God cannot sin, for His seed remains in him, as John the most intelligent, the thunder of the Apostles, has said."

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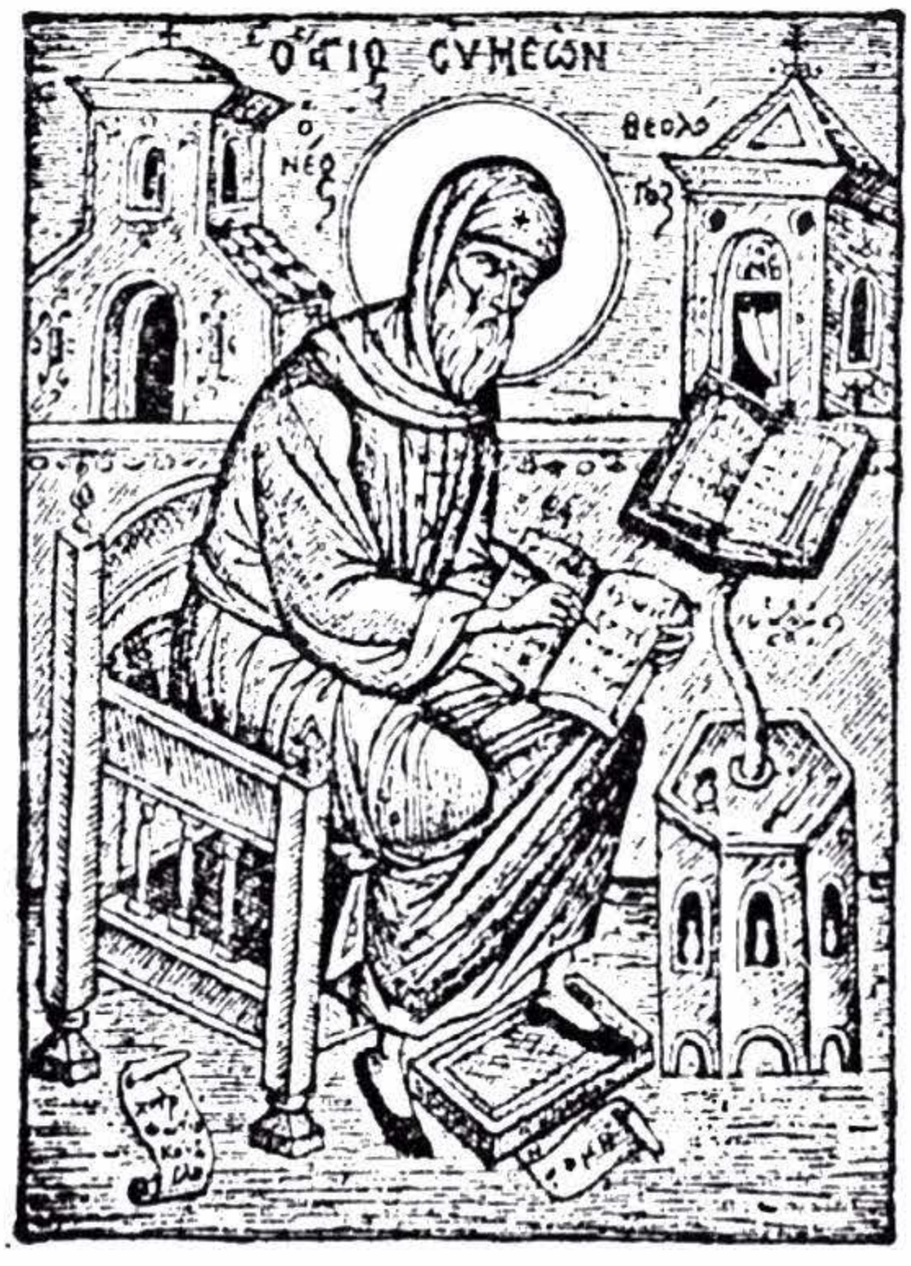
* This chapter is taken in its entirety from Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, *Historical Teaching of the Fathers of the Church,* vol. 3, St. Petersburg, 1882, pp. 306-308.

These words in themselves indicate that the states of which St. Symeon speaks are ones for which great preparatory struggles are required. In order to see this in the writings of St. Symeon, it is sufficient to read his instruction concerning the third form of prayer, and in particular the place where he speaks of the preparatory states and understanding of the struggler. One may cite also some other words of his: "Before lamentation and tears let us not be deceived by empty words, and let us not delude ourselves as to our advancement in piety . . . Without tears the hardness of our heart will not be softened, the soul will not acquire humility of spirit, we will not be able to make ourselves humble; and whoever has not put himself in order in this way cannot be united with the Holy Spirit."

Concerning these preparatory states he speaks in such detail and offers numerous wise means, warnings, and exhortations that could be uttered only by a person who has studied the moral life in experience, and not for just a year but for decades. His works are a most abundant treasury of thoughts on spiritual life, thoughts which act with power on the soul that thirsts for piety.

St. Symeon is called the New Theologian because he taught such profound mysteries of the inner life of struggle as had been long forgotten.



St. Symeon the New Theologian
Icon by Photios Kontoglou

THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

APPENDIX

SOME RECENT ORTHODOX RESPONSES TO THE CURRENT DISCUSSION ON LIFE AFTER DEATH

1. *The Mystery of Death and the Beyond**

By Father Ambroise Fontrier
Dean of French Orthodox Parishes
of the Russian Church Outside of Russia

Radio, television, periodicals, and a book have been speaking lately (in France) about death and the beyond. Even a Greek periodical appearing in French, and supposedly Orthodox, has taken part in this chorus, publishing an article entitled: "Tell me why . . . no one has ever returned!" And the author concludes: "No human knowledge can give a certain answer to this mystery of the beyond: only faith dissipates the shadows a little . . . " In passing, he tips his hat to the Lord, Whom he calls "the qualified ferryman, . . . " a ferryman who strangely recalls Charon, the pilot of hades in Greek mythology, who conducted the souls of the dead over the river Styx in his boat for the price of an obolus.

If the author of the article in question only had the text of the Orthodox funeral service, or the services for the dead on Saturdays; if he had read the Lives of the Saints or of the

*Translated from the author's periodical *Catchechese Orthodoxe,* vol. VIII, no. 26, pp. 74-84.

Fathers of the desert — he would have been able to "give an answer to this mystery of the beyond" and edify his readers. But our "Orthodox" ecumenists and modernists, owing to their flirtation with this world for which Christ the Saviour did not wish to pray, have become the salt which has lost its savor and which is good for nothing but to be trampled underfoot, according to the infallible word of the Lord.

In order to "dissipate a little the shadows" of the editor of the Greek periodical and edify at the same time our faithful and our readers, we give here three texts on the mystery of death and the beyond.

Tr. note: The first two texts are from St. Dionysius the Areopagite and from the life of an Athonite monk, showing how an Orthodox Christian prepares for death and the separation of the soul from the body. The third text, from the life of the late Greek iconographer, Photios Kontoglou (reposed in 1965) is translated below in full. (For his biography, see The Orthodox Word, *Sept.-Oct., 1966).*

The Great Wager
Between Believers and Unbelievers

By Photios Kontoglou*

On Pascha Monday, in the evening after midnight, before lying down to sleep I went out into the little garden behind my house. The sky was dark and covered with stars. I seemed to see it for the first time, and a distant psalmody seemed to descend from it. My lips murmured, very softly: "Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship the footstool of His feet." A holy man once told me that during these hours the heavens are opened. The air exhaled a fragrance of the flowers and herbs I had planted. "Heaven and earth are filled with the glory of the Lord."

*From his book *Mystical Flowers*, Athens, 1977.

I could well have remained there alone until break of day. I was as if without a body and without any bond to the earth. But fearing that my absence would disturb those with me in the house, I returned and lay down.

Sleep had not really taken possession of me; I do not know whether I was awake or asleep, when suddenly a strange man rose up before me. He was as pale as a dead man. His eyes were as if open, and he looked at me in terror. His face was like a mask, like a mummy's. His glistening, dark yellow skin was stretched tight over his dead man's head with all its cavities. He was as if panting. In one hand he held some kind of bizarre object which I could not make out; the other hand was clutching his breast as if he were suffering.

This creature filled me with terror. I looked at him and he looked at me without speaking, as if he were waiting for me to recognize him, strange as he was. And a voice said to me: "It is so-and-so!" And I recognized him immediately. Then he opened his mouth and sighed. His voice came from far away; it came up as from a deep well.

He was in great agony, and I suffered for him. His hands, his feet, his eyes — everything showed that he was suffering. In my despair I was going to help him, but he gave me a sign with his hand to stop. He began to groan in such a way that I froze. Then he said to me: "I have not come; I have been sent. I shake without stop; I am dizzy. Pray God to have pity on me. I want to die but I cannot. Alas! Everything you told me before is true. Do you remember how, several days before my death, you came to see me and spoke about religion? There were two other friends with me, unbelievers like myself. You spoke, and they mocked. When you left, they said: 'What a pity! He is intelligent and he believes the stupid things old women believe!'

"Another time, and other times too, I told you: 'Dear Photios, save up money, or else you will die a pauper. Look at my riches, and I want more of them.' You told me then: 'Have you signed a pact with death, that you can live as many years as you want and enjoy a happy old age?'

"And I replied: 'You will see to what an age I will live!

Now I am 75; I will live past a hundred. My children are free from want. My son earns a lot of money, and I have married my daughter to a rich Ethiopian. My wife and I have more money than we need. I am not like you who listen to what the priests say: "A Christian ending to our life . . ." and the rest. What have you to gain from a Christian ending? Better a full pocket and no worries . . . Give alms? Why did your so merciful God create paupers? Why should *I* feed them? And they ask you, in order to go to Paradise, to feed idlers! Do you want to talk about Paradise? You know that I am the son of a priest and that I know well all these tricks. That those who have no brains believe them is well enough, but you who have a mind have gone astray. If you continue to live as you are doing, you will die before me, and you will be responsible for those you have led astray. As a physician I tell you and affirm that I will live a hundred and ten years . . .' "

After saying all this, he turned this way and that as if he were on a grill. I heard his groans: "Ah! Ouch! Oh! Oh!" He was silent for a moment, and then continued: "This is what I said, and in a few days I was dead! I was dead, and I lost the wager! What confusion was mine, what horror! Lost, I descended into the abyss. What suffering I have had up to now, what agony! Everything you told me was true. *You have won the wager!*

"When I was in the world where you are now, I was an intellectual, I was a physician. I had learned how to speak and to be listened to, to mock religion, to discuss whatever falls under the senses. And now I see that everything I called stories, myths, paper lanterns — is true. The agony which I am experiencing now — this is what is true, this is the worm that never sleeps, this is the gnashing of teeth."

After having spoken thus, he disappeared. I still heard his groans, which gradually faded away. Sleep had begun to take possession of me, when I felt an icy hand touch me. I opened my eyes and saw him again before me. This time he was more horrible and smaller in body. He had become like a nursing infant, with a large old man's head which he was shaking.

"In a short time the day will break, and those who have sent me will come to seek me!"

"Who are they?"

He spoke some confused words which I could not make out. Then he added: "There where I am, there are also many who mock you and your faith. Now they understand that their spiritual darts have not gone beyond the cemetery. There are both those you have done good to, and those who have slandered you. The more you forgive them, the more they detest you. Man is evil. Instead of rejoicing him, kindness makes him bitter, because it makes him feel his defeat. The state of these latter is worse than mine. They cannot leave their dark prison to come and find you as I have done. They are severely tormented, lashed by the whip of God's love, as one of the Saints has said.* The world is something else entirely from what we see! Our intellect shows it to us in reverse. Now we understand that our intellect was only stupid, our conversations were spiteful meanness, our joys were lies and illusions.

"You who bear God in your hearts, Whose word is Truth, the only Truth — you have won the great wager between believers and unbelievers. This wager I have lost. I tremble, I sigh, and I find no rest. In truth, *there is no repentance in hell.* Woe to those who walk as I did when I was on earth. Our flesh was drunk and mocked those who believed in God and eternal life; almost everyone applauded us. They treated you as mad, as imbeciles. And the more you accept our mockeries, the more our rage increases.

"Now I see how much the conduct of evil men grieved you. How could you bear with such patience the poisoned darts which issued from our lips which treated you as hypocrites, mockers of God, and deceivers of the people. If these evil men who are still on earth would see where I am, if only they were in my place, they would tremble for everything they are doing. I would like to appear to them and tell them to change their path, but I do not have the permission to do so, just as the rich man did not have it when he begged Abraham to send Lazarus the pauper. Lazarus was not sent, so that those

*St. Isaac the Syrian.

who sinned might be worthy of punishment and those who went on the ways of God might be worthy of salvation.

"*He that is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness yet more; and he that is filthy, let him be made filthy yet more. And he that is righteous, let him do righteousness yet more; and he that is holy, let him be made holy yet more*" (Apoc. 22:11)

With these words he disappeared.

Ed. note: Earlier in the book (chapter 2) we have quoted the teaching of Blessed Augustine that ordinarily it is only the saints who are able to have contact with the living, while ordinary sinners are bound in hell and cannot come out. However, it does happen, as in the present case, that God allows a soul from hell to appear to the living for some special purpose; some similar appearances are recorded in the book Eternal Mysteries Beyond the Grave. *As Blessed Augustine writes: "The dead* of themselves *have no power to intervene in the affairs of the living" ("Care for the Dead," ch. 16), and appear to the living only by God's special allowance. It remains true, nevertheless, that such appearances are very rare, and the vast majority of the appearances of the "dead," most notably those that occur through mediums, are the work of demons masquerading as the dead.*

2. *A Return from the Dead in Contemporary Greece*

By Archimandrite Cyprian
Abbot of the Monastery of
Sts. Cyprian and Justina, Fili, Greece

Herewith I am sending you an account of a person I know who died and returned to life, which I think you will find interesting as an example for your series of articles.

About four years ago, we received a call to take Holy Communion to an old lady, a widow living in a suburb of Athens. She was an old calendarist, and being almost bedridden, was unable to get to church. Though normally we do not un-

dertake such services outside the monastery, and would direct people to a parish priest, nonetheless on this occasion I had a special feeling that I should go, and having prepared the Holy Gifts, I set out from the monastery. I found the old lady lying ill in a small and poor room; having no means of her own, she was cared for by various kind neighbors who brought her food and other necessities. I set down the Holy Gifts, and asked her if there was anything she wished to confess. She replied, "No, there is nothing on my conscience from these past years which I have not already confessed, but there is one grave sin from years ago which I would like to tell you, even though I have confessed it to many priests." I replied that if she had already confessed it, she should not do so again. But she insisted, and what she had to tell is as follows:

When she was young and newly married, some 35 years before, she became pregnant at a time when her family was in the greatest financial straits. The other members of the family pressed her to have an abortion, but she refused absolutely. Eventually, however, due to the threats of her mother-in-law, she gave in against her will, and the operation was performed. The medical supervision of the illicit operation was very primitive, with the result that she caught a serious infection, and within the space of a few days died, without being able to confess her sin.

At the moment of death, which occurred in the evening, she felt her soul part from the body in the way that is usually described; her soul remained nearby and watched the body being washed, clothed and placed in the coffin. In the morning, she followed the procession to the church, watched the funeral, and saw the coffin loaded into the hearse for transfer to the cemetery. The soul was as though flying a small height above the body.

Suddenly there appeared in the road two "deacons," as she described them, in shining white stichatia and oraria. One of them was reading a scroll. As the car approached, he held up his hand, and the car ground to a halt. The driver got out to see what was wrong with the motor, and in the meanwhile the angels started to converse. The one holding the scroll,

which was clearly the record of her sins, looked up from his reading and said: "It is sad, she has a very serious sin on her list, and is bound for hell, since she did not confess it." "Yes," said the other, "but it is a pity that she should be punished, as she did not want to do it, but was forced into it by her family." "Very well," replied the first, "the only thing to do is to send her back to be able to confess her sin and repent of it."

With these words, she felt herself being drawn back into her body, for which at that moment she felt an indescribable disgust and repulsion. After a moment, she came to, and started to knock on the inside of the coffin, which had been closed. The scene that followed can be imagined.

After hearing her history, which I have set forth in brief. I gave her Holy Communion, and departed giving glory to God who had permitted me to hear it. Being a matter of confession, I cannot tell you her name, but can inform you that she is still alive. If you feel it would be edifying, you certainly have my permission to publish it.

The Teaching of Bishop Theophan the Recluse on the Aerial Toll-houses

Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov was the leading defender of the Orthodox teaching of the aerial toll-houses in 19th-century Russia, when unbelievers and modernists were already beginning to scoff at it; but Bishop Theophan the Recluse was no less a firm defender of this teaching, which he saw as an integral part of the whole Orthodox teaching on the unseen warfare or spiritual struggle against demons. Here we give one of his statements on the toll-houses, which is part of his commentary on the eightieh verse of Psalm 118: *Let my heart be blameless in Thy statutes, that I may not be put to shame.*

"The prophet does not mention how and where one "may not be put to shame.' The nearest 'not being put to shame' occurs during the arising of inward battles . . .

"The second moment of not being put to shame is the time of death and the passage through the toll-houses. No matter how absurd the idea of the toll-houses may seem to our 'wise men,' they will not escape passing through them. What do these toll-gatherers seek in those who pass through? They seek whether people might have some of their goods. What kind of goods? Passions. Therefore, in the person whose heart is pure and a stranger to passions, they cannot find anything to wrangle over; on the contrary, the opposing quality will strike them like arrows of lightning. To this someone who has a little education expressed the following thought: The toll-houses are something frightful. But it is quite possible that the demons, instead of something frightful, might present something seductive. They might present something deceptive and seductive, according to all the kinds of passions, to the soul as it passes through one after the other. When, during the course of earthly life, the passions have been banished from the heart and the virtues opposed to them have been planted, then no matter what seductive thing you might present, the soul, having no kind of sympathy for it, passes it by, turning away from it with disgust. But when the heart has not been cleansed, the soul will rush to whatever passion the heart has most sympathy for; and the demons will take it like a friend, and then they know where to put it. Therefore, it is very doubtful that a soul, as long as there remain in it sympathies for the objects of any passion, will not be put to shame at the toll-houses. Being put to shame here means that the soul itself is thrown into hell.

"But the final being put to shame is at the Last Judgment, before the face of the All-seeing Judge . . ."*

**The One-Hundred Eighteenth Psalm, Interpreted by Bishop Theophan*, Moscow, 1891, reprinted Jordanville, 1976, pp. 289-290; see the English summary printed by New Diveyevo Convent, Spring Valley, N.Y., 1978, p. 24.

SAINT HERMAN
SUMMER PILGRIMAGE, 1978

(Continued from page 11)

When St. Cosmas gave instruction to people, he did it with warmth, but also very calmly, quietly, and joyously, just like the Holy Apostles themselves. He travelled mostly on foot, up and down the countryside of Greece and neighboring countries as well, preaching to people wherever he went. As he went, he would send word ahead to those in the next village to prepare themselves by confessing their sins, fasting, and taking part in a vigil service. And then, when he arrived in the village, he would serve Divine Liturgy and preach. Sometimes there were as many as two or three thousand who would come to hear him, and they would have to meet in a large, open field, because the local village church was too small.

St. Cosmas established many schools in villages and towns so that people could learn to read and write. He talked rich people into buying prayer-ropes and crosses so that he could give these to poor Christians. He was a true apostle for Greece, and God also worked many miracles through him.

At that time, Greece was enslaved by the Turks, who were Moslems and hated and persecuted the Christians. Finally seven Turkish executioners came and got St. Cosmas because they were afraid that he would raise the people against the Turkish government. They took him to the bank of a large river, where they hanged him from a tree and then threw his body into the river, weighted down by a stone. But through God's grace, three days later some Chrsitians saw his body floating in the water and rescued it so that it could be buried in a proper Christian way.

This great Christian missionary saint preached to people in a very simple way. He used simple examples when he was teaching — especially examples from nature. He used to tell his people that just as a swallow needs two wings in order to fly, so we poor humans need two things if we wish to fly to Paradise: the first wing we must have is love of God, and the second is love for our neighbor.

In his life, St. Cosmas shows us:

1. How he made good use of the talents God has given him. God gave him the gift to teach, and he put this gift into God's service by becoming a preaching missionary.

2. Secondly, St. Cosmas showed his love for his fellow men by telling them about God and His holy Church and the way of salvation. You know, if you truly love someone, you want to show your love by giving them something really special and wonderful. What greater gift is there than to give them the gift of knowing about Orthodoxy?

3. We can see from the life of St. Cosmas that it isn't necessary always to go off to some foreign pagan country in order to preach the Gospel and win souls to Christ. Sometimes this can be done right in our own country, just as St. Cosmas did in Greece, among his own people.

And the same is true for us here today: no matter what your situation in life, there are people you can think of that need to hear about Christ and His Church.

There are two other missionary saints I want to tell you about today. How many of you have heard about St. Innocent of Alaska? He was a great missionary saint, too. He came to Alaska and went out to preach to the Indians there. He learned their language so that he could teach them in their own language, and then he began to translate the Holy Scriptures and some of the Divine Services, too. These Indians didn't even have an alphabet of their own, and so he had to invent one for them!

Something very interesting about St. Innocent is that he had a real talent as a carpenter and woodcarver. This was a talent from God, just like St. Cosmas' talent for teaching. And so, St. Innocent put this talent into God's service; he set up workshops where he taught the Indians how to make furniture and carve wood, so they could have enough money to support the mission and their own families.

Also, and most important of all, of course, he peacefully presented the teachings of Christ to these Indians. He taught them with all love and meekness, and he also taught them by his own godly example. In this way he imitated the holy, shining example of that other great missionary to Alaska who is also the patron saint of America. Do you know who I'm talking about? — Yes, it is St. Herman of Alaska.

You know, we can learn a lot about saints by reading the services to them. The whole point of St. Herman's life is summed up in this sticheron from his service:

"Having one desire, to bring unbelieving people to the One God, thou wast all things to all men, teaching the Holy Scripture and a life in accordance with it, instructing in handicrafts, and being intercessor before the authorities, nursing men in everything like children, that thus thou mightest bring them to God; and do not leave us who sing to thee."

Can you see from this how St. Innocent was very much like St. Herman? His whole desire was to bring an unbelieving people to the One God. He taught them the message of the Gospel and also how to live in accordance with the Gospel.

When he first came to Alaska, St. Innocent was a missionary priest. But later on, after his wife reposed, the Church auhorities back in Russia con-

secrated him bishop of Alaska. This meant that he had to travel even more than before. In those days, travelling around Alaska was a tremendous labor. St. Innocent had to travel by open dog sled in winter temperatures that were often 30 degrees below zero. His diocese was the wildest, coldest, and probably the most dangerous country on earth. When the weather was good, St. Innocent journeyed up and down the rivers of Alaska by boat, stopping at every town and village on the river in order to preach to whoever came down to the shore to see him. In this way, he completely gave himself for his flock, just as our Lord gave Himself for all of us when He died on the cross.

Now, what is the point of this? What do these three missionary saints have to do with us today?

Maybe you've heard this saying: "Hell is built of hard hearts." The world we live in today is filled with people who have hard hearts towards each other and even towards members of their own family. Maybe even some of you have cold, hard hearts towards people in your own family.

People are doing terrible things today. Remember the example of abortion that I mentioned earlier? Do you realize that since abortion was legalized in this country just a few years ago, *millions* of unborn children have been murdered? Imagine what a terrible judgment this country is building up for herself because of this. And why is it happening? Why are abortions now an everyday thing?

Because love is dying out in the world. And when real love for God and love for neighbor starts to die out, people begin to do awful things and behave like criminals and madmen.

Because love is dying out, people are becoming very hungry for God. They don't realize that it's God they want in their lives, but it is. They are searching everywhere for God. Some search in different Protestant churches or in the Catholic church; some of them go to far eastern religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, or transcendental meditation and yoga — which of course open people up to the activity of demons.

And most people, when they don't find God, just start living for themselves, living as if there isn't any God at all. They become very selfish; nothing matters except what appeals to them personally. And life without God is so terrible, and so cold, and so lonely and frightening, that people try to forget this pain by escaping into alcohol, drugs, and sex. These things become their God!

And this is why America is a very pagan, un-Christian land. Can you begin to see now why our country needs real missionaries desperately?

Where are these missionaries going to come from? They are going to come from people like you. Some of you — even most of you — will have to

be missionaries, so that the people in this country who are starving to know what the truth is, can learn. If you don't do it, who will?

To be a missionary doesn't mean going to a missionary school and getting some special kind of "degree." But it *does* mean that you must *have a conscious faith*. You must know the basics of our Orthodox faith and you must strive with all your might to live an Orthodox way of life.

You know, the world around us keeps trying to force its own ideas on us. And these ideas are *very* pagan. T.V., pop music, movies, our friends, sometimes even our teachers, try to get us to spend our time on worthless and selfish things that make us forget about Christ and His All-pure Mother and the saints. And most of us *do* live as though we didn't know anything about Christ and Orthodoxy, don't we?

It takes a lot of courage to turn away from the things of this world and be a conscious Orthodox Christian. But God helps us to walk along this way.

Do you remember how in Scripture Christ says that He is the *Vine* and we are the *branches?* If you look up at a tree you see that all of the branches are alive and bear some kind of fruit or berries or flowers in season because they are joined to the main trunk of the tree. The trunk sends sap into the branches, so that they remain alive and continue to put forth green leaves.

But what if you take an axe and cut a branch from the tree? What will happen? That branch will start to shrivel up and die. It will never produce more green leaves, or flowers, or fruit, or berries, *or anything at all*. It will be useless for anything except to be thrown on a fire.

It's exactly the same for us Orthodox Christians. As long as we are joined to Christ through the sacraments and an Orthodox way of life, we can be spiritually alive: Christ sends His life-giving grace into our souls, just as the tree sends sap into the branches. And as long as we stay united to Christ through His Holy Orthodox Church, we can bring forth green leaves and some kind of spiritual fruit.

But if we ever cut ourselves off from the Church, our souls begin to wither and die, just like the branch, and we will never be able to produce any spiritual fruit. And we will be good for nothing, Christ says, except to be thrown on a fire, just like a dead branch is!

Of course, it is God Who decides what kind of spiritual fruit He wants us to produce. Remember how St. Cosmas put to use the talent God had given him for teaching? Remember how St. Herman and St. Innocent produced such wonderful fruit in the example of their unselfish and loving lives?

Perhaps you don't as yet know what your particular talent is, but in time you will. Perhaps God will want you to bear a very special spiritual fruit,

such as being a priest or that most wonderful thing of all, being a monk or nun.

Blessed Theophan the Recluse said that Orthodoxy is "an entirely different world." And it's our Orthodox mission in this country today to open a door upon this holy world of Orthodoxy so that those who are hungry to know about God can catch a glimpse of what is on the other side and want to come in when we invite them.

How do we open a door on the world of God for other people to see?

We do this by our own lives, our own example. Think about St. Cosmas, and St. Herman, and St. Innocent — think about how they tried to actually *live* what they believed, and how they became more and more like Christ in their lives. This is what inspired so many people to want to also live in the same way, living for God.

Now, if your friends at school look at you, and the way you live, do they say to themselves: I wouldn't want to be like him! He's a selfish, self-centered person who lives according to the ways of the world. He never tries to do anything for others. He has no respect for his parents or teachers. He smokes, and drinks, and swears just like the rest of us do. He says he's an Orthodox Christian, but *that* can't be anything very special if *this* is the way he lives!

But if someone looks at the way you live and thinks: what is this special thing in his life? I see how he is so loving towards other people. He's always putting himself out for others and sacrificing himself both at home and outside the home. He tries to lead a clean life. He goes to church regularly and he even fasts! I wonder what this Orthodox Church he goes to is like? Maybe it's something that I should know about, too.

So you see, in your everyday life you are *already* a missionary and you don't even know it! By the way that you act and talk and the things you do, you are already teaching people about Orthodoxy — just by your example. In fact, your own example probably teaches them more about what kind of faith you have than if you were to preach to them!

Now the question you must ask yourself is: What kind of missionary am I? When I meet people do I plant seeds of love for Christ and His Church in their hearts, or do I plant seeds of hatred or contempt or indifference?

Ask yourself this question, right now! What kind of missionary am I? What kind of example am I giving to my friends? If someone is secretly hungry to know about God, what kind of spiritual food will I be able to give them?

And then ask yourself: What *more* can I do to be a good missionary?

Well, first you can try to live an Orthodox way of life as much as

possible. This doesn't mean just in external things, although those are also important. It means first of all sruggling with your sins and sinful habits and asking God and His Most Holy Mother and your patron saint to help you in this struggle.

And then there are some other important things you can do: start *today* to learn more about Orthodoxy. Read the lives of saints, especially — not just books or essays about theology — because the saints are a *living* theology, a theology in action, and their example can teach us so much.

You know, young people are always wanting to be "free" — free of pressures, free of parental restrictions, free of rules, free of school, *free!* But the most important freedom of all — in fact, the only *real* freedom — is to be free of one's sins!

You can be free of your family, and school, and responsibilities, but as long as you are not free of your sins, you are a *slave* — a slave to your own sins. And this means that you are not really free at all in any way, even though you may think that you are.

The lives of saints teach us how to become free of our sins. What a wonderful, God-pleasing thing *this* kind of freedom is! And how many of your non-Orthodox friends know about that kind of freedom? *You could teach them!* You can teach them by the example of your own life, first of all. And then there are some other things you can do:

Invite a friend to come to church with you sometime so that he can see for himself how very beautiful Orthodox Church services are, and he can see how this is "heaven on earth."

Be prepared to answer his questions about what he sees. For him, Orthodox services will seem strangely wonderful and beautiful, and then you will be surprised at how you've taken these things for granted all these years, just because you've grown up in them.

Be sure that you have icons in your room at home. When friends come to visit, make sure that you can answer any questions they might have about the icons. Of course, that means that you will have to know something about icons and what they are and why they are painted in a certain way that is different from the art that the rest of the world uses.

But most important of all: make your friends see that your Orthodox Faith is the greatest and richest treasure you possess, the most precious thing on earth.

Now, perhaps this kind of missionary work, among your own friends, doesn't sound very important to you. But really, it is the most important kind of missionary work possible or needed today. We don't need to go off to some foreign country to convert pagan tribes to Orthodoxy. The whole of the United

States is a pagan tribe that needs to know about Christ and how to save the soul!

You are already living in a pagan country! And so the missionary work that needs to be done is right here, all around us, every single day, right in our own circles of friends at school or at home.

One thing you should keep in mind. When you die, and you stand before the throne of judgment. God may say to you: "Well, little Christian soul, I put you on the earth in the midst of a sea of unbelieving, ungodly people. And I gave you the gift of My Truth, the Orthodox Faith. Tell me now, Christian soul, what did you do with that Faith I gave you? Did you protect it and also share it with others? Or did you ignore it? Where is your spiritual fruit? Open your hands and show me if they are empty or if they are full of spiritual fruit. Show me what you have done to save souls!"

And what will you say? And when you open your hands before the Almighty God, will they be empty?

Let us make a resolution right now to begin to live an Orthodox way of life as completely as we can and therefore be a missionary to other people by our own example. Let us ask God and His saints to help us to start producing spiritual fruit that will be pleasing in the sight of God to Whom be all honor, glory, and worship, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

By the end of this talk it was late afternoon, and the pilgrims were conducted to a panoramic hillock some half-mile west of the main monastery buildings, the so-called "St. Elias Skete" overlooking a deep gorge and the mountain wilderness beyond. Here, before the Kursk Icon and with Archbishop Anthony present, Vespers was served for the feast day to follow, the commemoration of another historic Russian Wonderworking Icon, the Smolensk Mother of God, which is the chief icon of the Mother of God in the monastery church.

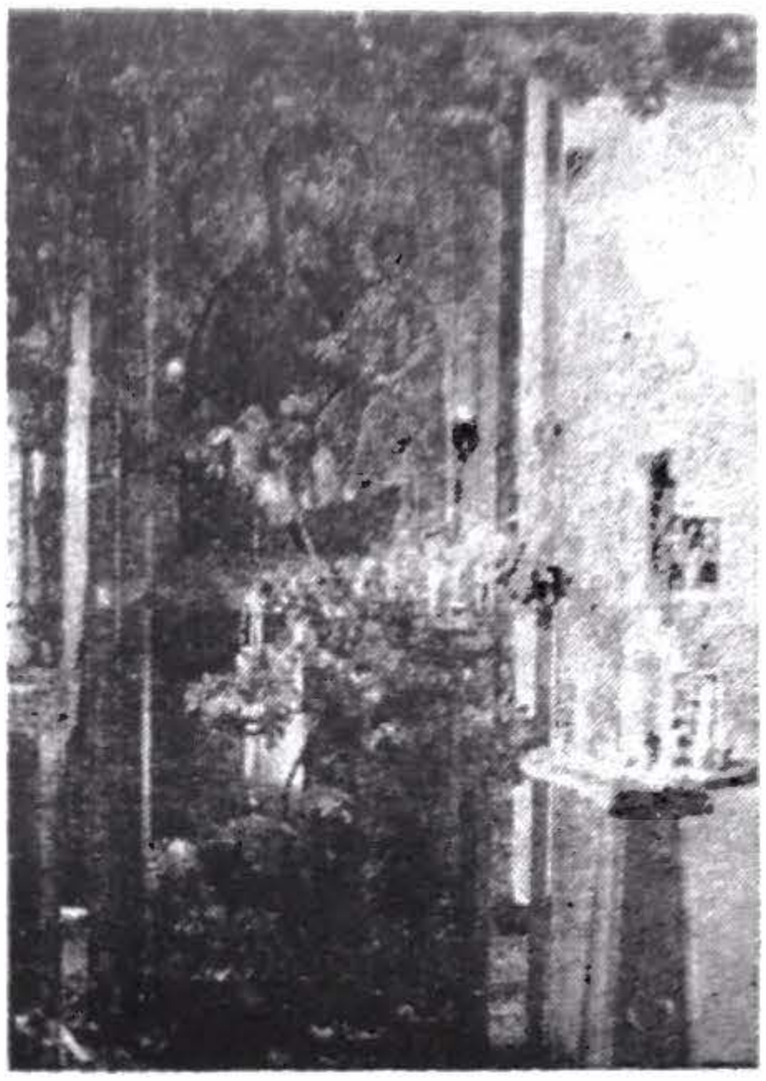
The evening ended with a full-length color motion picture, "Pascha in the Holy Land."

Most of the pilgrims were young Orthodox people, mostly from far away (there being few Orthodox Christians in this part of California), and many of them stayed overnight in the forest in sleeping bags, the men within the monastery itself, and the women outside the gate near the small monastery guesthouse.

The next morning, the third day of the Pilgrimage, a new series of lectures was given.

"BLESSED YOUTH PETER MICHURIN" was a translation of the

St. Herman Church
from the south



Interior of the church:
the Smolensk Icon (Hodigitria)

Archimandrite Spiridon, Bishops Nektary and Anthony

During the lectures: Hierarchs Nectary and Anthony

The Monastery church: on the left the site of the future belfry

The well of Blessed
Archbishop John

In the monastery
print shop

life and an introductory explanation about a remarkable young man of early 19th-century Russia, given by Seminarian Gregory Dobrow.

"THE LIFE'S PATH OF ARCHBISHOP JOHN" was the title of a talk by Archimandrite Spiridon, who had known Archbishop John (Maximovitch) well from his school days in Yugoslavia, having been tonsured and ordained by him. *"In every place of His dominion, bless the Lord, O my soul!* Our Vladika John travelled much, both geographically and figuratively, so that his soul unceasingly blessed the Lord in every place" — thus Fr. Spiridon began his reminiscences of Archbishop John.

"THE RESTORATION OF THE ORTHODOX WAY OF LIFE" was Hieromonk Herman's lecture on the life of a righteous man of our own times, the newly-reposed Archbishop Andrew of New Diveyevo.

In the evening there was a lecture with slides by Miss Marina D. Ilyin on the history and present state of Fort Ross, the 19th-century Russian settlement on the Northern California coast.

The whole Pilgrimage was oriented towards helping the pilgrims to lead a serious and conscientious Orthodox spiritual life, centered around devout preparation for and reception of Holy Communion, and it was noticeable that the pilgrims approached the services and talks very seriously. Some were able to stay for another week of special courses at the monastery in church history, music, etc., for which the Pilgrimage served as an introduction.

Although not too much could be crowded into the course of a few days, it was obvious from the interest shown that there is a great hunger among Orthodox young people and potential converts for true Orthodox enlightenment in the age-old tradition of the past. The pilgrims brought back fond memories of these days in the California mountains far from the distractions of today's cities, and many seeds were sown for further labors in Christ's vineyard.

LETTERS

(Continued)

was moved to tears just to set my gaze upon the image imprinted upon the linen cloth! We had to stand in line, in a downpour, for over two hours in order to get into the church, and I must admit that piety of *any* kind among the people was difficult to find until one entered the church in the presence of the Shroud. Being able to stand within ten feet or so of the Shroud made me feel unworthy to be there. How anyone can say the image is difficult to see with the bare eyes I cannot understand, for the image of our crucified Lord is clearly visible without any aids.

R., California

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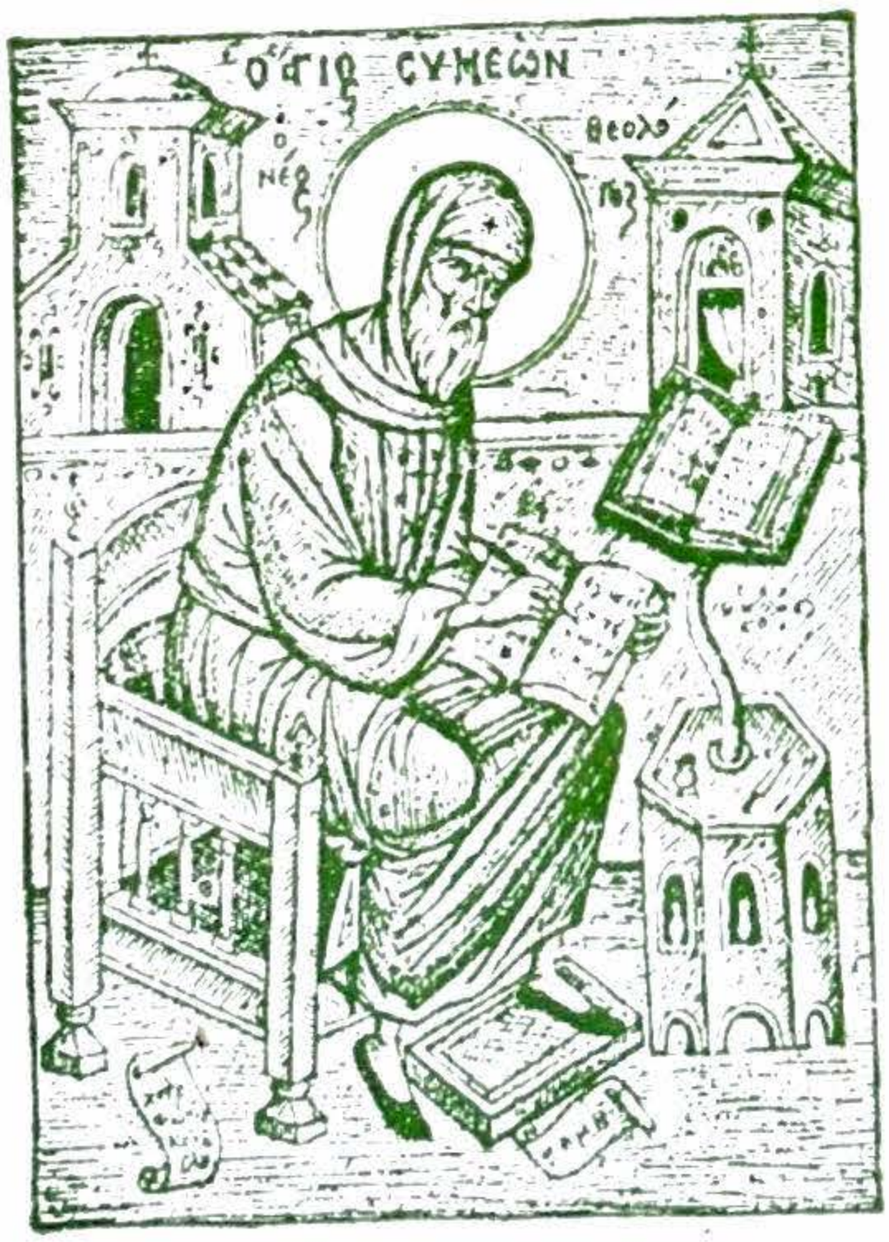

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